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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KYIV 002752

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: UKRAINE: PRESIDENT YUSHCHENKO FINALLY TO VISIT
ISRAEL?

REF: A. KYIV 2718
[1](#)B. KYIV 764

Classified By: Political Counselor Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Israeli Embassy DCM Shahar Arieli confirmed that President Victor Yushchenko plans to visit Israel in mid-November and that he would also visit Ramallah and meet with Palestinian National Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, although he noted that previous planned visits did not materialize. Arieli said the Ukrainian Embassy would be arranging Yushchenko's meeting with the Ukrainian diaspora in Israel, but he wondered how many people would gather. Issues likely to be raised by the Israelis will include GoU efforts to counter anti-Semitism and Yushchenko's decision to honor the controversial Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) leader Roman Shukhevych, who some allege assisted German forces with genocide during the Second World War. Arieli suggested that Yushchenko would push for Knesset recognition of the Stalin-era "Holodomor" famine as genocide, but also noted that the Knesset rarely took a position on foreign policy issues and that Israelis generally had questions about whether the Holodomor was truly directed only against Ukrainians. End Summary

[1](#)2. (C) Israeli Embassy DCM Shahar Arieli noted in passing to us, during a November 1 meeting primarily on other topics, that Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko was planning to visit Israel in mid-November. (Note: The Interfax wire service cited Presidential Secretariat Deputy Chief of Staff Oleksandr Chaliy as saying November 1 that Yushchenko would visit Israel November 14-15 and "sign documents aimed at boosting bilateral cooperation.") During the visit, Yushchenko would also visit Ramallah and have a meeting with Palestinian National Authority President Mahmoud Abbas (whom Arieli referred to by the honorific "Abu Mazen"). Arieli said the Israeli government would not object to the proposed meeting with Abbas, although noted that the Israelis had resisted the idea when the Ukrainians had proposed it last time Yushchenko was scheduled to visit Israel (a 2006 visit which ultimately did not take place, ref B).

[1](#)3. (C) When we congratulated Arieli for finally scheduling the Ukrainian president's visit, he wryly noted that dates had also been agreed for earlier planned trips that ultimately did not materialize. Although Yushchenko was personally committed to making a trip to Israel, his advisers were wary regarding the possibility that such a visit might stoke ongoing and simmering bilateral differences. For their part, the Israelis would raise what they see as a lack of action against the Interregional Academy for Personnel Management (known by its Ukrainian acronym, MAUP), which publicly espouses an anti-Semitic line. (Note: Also as noted ref B, the Israelis are also likely to raise Ukraine's

membership in the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. In our discussions with MFA contacts on this subject, the Ukrainian approach has been simply to not participate in what they describe as a "moribund committee," but they also do not want to attract negative Middle Eastern attention by formally withdrawing. End Note.) Arieli suggested that Yushchenko would push for Knesset recognition of the Stalin-era "Holodomor" famine as genocide (the Ukrainian National Day of Remembrance for the Holodomor is scheduled for November 24).

He noted that, on this point, however, the Knesset rarely took a position on foreign policy issues and Israelis generally had questions whether the Holodomor was truly directed against the Ukrainians as a group and about the number of deaths from hunger.

14. (SBU) Arieli said the Ukrainian Embassy would be arranging Yushchenko's meeting with the Ukrainian diaspora in Israel, but he wondered how many people would gather. Israelis of Ukrainian origin generally did not maintain a strong emotional tie to Ukraine and tended to view their birth in the territory of the modern Ukrainian state to be an accident of geography. (Note: Probably the most famous Israeli born in Ukraine was former Prime Minister Golda Meir, who was born in Kyiv, then immigrated to the U.S.) Arieli commented that the historical connection between the two countries was always noted in a ceremonial way during official visits and meetings, but had little real significance for the relationship. Arieli opined that the Ukrainian Embassy would also try to do something to further the bilateral economic relationship, but he was unsure what could be done practically to strengthen this area.

15. (C) Arieli asked for our view's on President Yushchenko's

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recent decision to honor controversial Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) leader Roman Shukhevych. Arieli asserted that Shukhevych led an SS police auxiliary unit during the early stages of the Second World War and reasoned that, because the unit was used to control civilians and not in combat, Shukhevych must have been complicit in war crimes committed by German forces - including massacres of Jews. We noted that we have heard differing views on the Shukhevych's role and welcomed any information that would shed light on allegations of his role in war crimes. He said this issue was also likely to be brought up during Yushchenko's visit to Israel.

16. (SBU) Also on the agenda would be Israeli concern about several recent anti-Semitic incidents and the rise in xenophobic attacks beginning in late 2006. Arieli agreed that the diplomatic community should follow-up with Ukrainian law enforcement officials on their recent promises to combat hate crimes and said his Embassy would support our efforts to press the GoU on this issue. He discounted Yushchenko's order to return Torah scrolls in government archives to Jewish communities as a public relations effort to improve his image before going to Israel. He added that he would rather see the GoU focus on stopping violent xenophobic attacks than issue decrees on religious property restitution.

17. (C) Comment: Although the visit is currently "on," there is still skepticism in Kyiv that it will actually take place. Ongoing political negotiations regarding the formation of a new parliamentary coalition and a possible start date for the parliament could result in another postponement of the trip. However, the pending visit almost certainly motivated several positive steps that Yushchenko recently took to combat anti-Semitism and xenophobia (see ref A). Despite these positive steps, if the trip takes place, Yushchenko will likely have to defend his decision to honor Shukhevych and reassure his Israeli counterparts that the GoU is taking steps to counter the recent anti-Semitic incidents if this is to be a successful visit.

18. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kyiv.
Taylor